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## Review of Haim Schwarzbaum, *Jewish Folklore between East and West. Collected Papers*

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## Review of Haim Schwarzbaum, *Jewish Folklore between East and West. Collected Papers*

### Abstract

In his obituary for Haim Schwarzbaum (1911-1983), Dov Noy tells that upon his arrival at Bloomington, Indiana in 1952 to begin his graduate studies, Stith Thompson asked him whether he knew Haim Schwarzbaum in Israel. He did not, and Professor Thompson invited Dov Noy to his office and showed him the thick file of correspondence that he conducted with Schwarzbaum, saying: "You should know that I correspond with over a hundred folklorists worldwide, and your Haim Schwarzbaum is the most erudite of them all" (Noy 1986, 88). At the time Schwarzbaum was in his early forties. Most of his publications to that date appeared in the literary supplement of newspapers; only two of his articles were published in Hebrew scholarly journals (GANUZ 1984, 10). Yet in his private scholarly correspondence he had already demonstrated his overflowing erudition to be deserving of such an accolade from the leading folktale scholar of our time. Folklorists learned about his scholarly acumen only in the late fifties, when his articles began to appear regularly in scholarly publications.

### Disciplines

Cultural History | Folklore | Jewish Studies | Near and Middle Eastern Studies

### Comments

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the way in which the doctrine of karma is anticipated in the Brāhmaṇas. This makes these texts interesting to interpret, but it still does not make them entirely fascinating reading. Some of the nineteenth-century criticism of the Brāhmaṇas was on a literary rather than a philosophical basis and should therefore be judged accordingly. To this day most literary-oriented readers still prefer to read those parts of the Brāhmaṇas that contain myths, such as the story of the flood, or how Cyavana was made young again, rather than the long discussions of ritual, even if these discussions can be shown to foreshadow karma theory. Those myths are of great antiquity and therefore of particular interest from the point of view of Asian folklore studies.

The present work is not only well argued but also well documented, references to the Sanskrit texts are given with great accuracy, and the translations are excellent. It is a pity, however, that the work of MINARD (1956) does not appear to have been consulted and has not been included among the references. There are several sections of Minard's enormous work that discuss the same matters as Tull, notably II, p. 329, "Sur une cosmogonie," which deals with Prajāpati and the cosmogonic egg and therefore covers the same topic as pp. 61 and 65-67 of the present work. Another topic covered by Minard is "Purāṇa des souffles" II, pp. 334-36, in a sequence which points out the same matters as pp. 92-93 of the present work. Minard's approach may be recondite, but he does give us hints that the cosmology involved in the Vedic sacrifice is somehow related to more widespread beliefs in sympathetic magic. Similar indications might have widened the interest of the present work. Nevertheless, we must be grateful to H. Tull for presenting such an incisive and authoritative work.

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## ISRAEL

SCHWARZBAUM, HAIM. *Jewish Folklore between East and West. Collected Papers*. Edited and introduced by Eli Yassif. Beer-Sheva, Israel: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 1989. vi+397 pages. General index and index of tale types. Cloth n.p. (Distributed by The Bialik Institute, 37 Pierre Koenig St. POB 92, Jerusalem 91920, Israel)

In his obituary for Haim Schwarzbaum (1911-1983), Dov Noy tells that upon his arrival at Bloomington, Indiana in 1952 to begin his graduate studies, Stith Thompson

asked him whether he knew Haim Schwarzbaum in Israel. He did not, and Professor Thompson invited Dov Noy to his office and showed him the thick file of correspondence that he conducted with Schwarzbaum, saying: "You should know that I correspond with over a hundred folklorists worldwide, and your Haim Schwarzbaum is the most erudite of them all" (Noy 1986, 88). At the time Schwarzbaum was in his early forties. Most of his publications to that date appeared in the literary supplement of newspapers; only two of his articles were published in Hebrew scholarly journals (GANUZ 1984, 10). Yet, in his private scholarly correspondence he had already demonstrated his overflowing erudition to be deserving of such an accolade from the leading folktale scholar of our time. Folklorists learned about his scholarly acumen only in the late fifties, when his articles began to appear regularly in scholarly publications. He solidified his reputation in the late sixties with the publication of *Studies in Jewish and World Folklore* (1968) and augmented it with two other books in English (SCHWARZBAUM 1979, 1982).

The present volume includes ten of Schwarzbaum's previously published articles. Since their publication, most of these essays have become part of the canon of Jewish folklore scholarship and are often cited. Their publication in a single volume will not only facilitate future reference but will also bring forth the essential qualities of Schwarzbaum's contribution to folklore. Eli Yassif has grouped the essays into four chapters that correspond to Schwarzbaum's interests: "Biblical and Post-Biblical Legends," "The Diffusion of Jewish Folklore Motifs," "Animal Tales and Fables," and "Studies in Medieval Folk-Books."

As Yassif points out in the Introduction, Schwarzbaum's scholarly forté is the comparative annotation. He has developed the bibliographical note to an art form that has a life of its own. Following the tradition of Reinhold KÖHLER (1898-1900) and BOLTE and POLIVKA (1913-1932), his notes are arabesques in which motifs and types, bibliographical references and thematic allusions intertwine in a style of free association, reaching its closure only with the exhaustion of the subject. They draw their authoritative force from the thoroughness of his coverage. Limited by neither editors nor space, Schwarzbaum brings together all the references for a tale that are at his command, and his command is phenomenal. He cites works in major European languages, in Hebrew, and in Arabic. To his chagrin he must resort to translations when he discusses Indian, Chinese, and Japanese sources. The bibliographical notes serve him as a forum for the expression of his theories and thoughts about folklore in general and the given tales in particular. Within the note frame he sets up his argument with other scholars, chiding them for overlooking this or that variant of a tale, and charting the direction of possible and probable influences of one version upon another. When his articles are not an annotation of a collection, they are still an extension of the note form, revolving around a broader theme rather than a single narrative.

Into this particular volume Yassif has assembled essays that provide the Jewish and Moslem sources to a Falasha (Ethiopian Jews) creation myth (15-30); the legend of the death of Aaron, the High Priest (31-74), and theodicy legends (75-125). Other articles explore particular motifs such as the overcrowded earth (127-42), the hero predestined to die on his wedding day (143-72), and female fickleness (173-96), the analogy between man's age and animal behavior (215-38), or specific genres (197-214) or medieval books (239-385). Although in theory Schwarzbaum sets up the cultural boundaries of his investigation, limiting himself to Jewish, Moslem, and sometimes Christian sources, in practice he does not refrain from going beyond these apparent limits to examine parallels in the folk traditions of Central and East Asian countries. For example, he opens the first essay in the volume with a version of the

creation myth of the Birhor tribe in India, and in the body of the article he refers extensively to Hindu mythological sources such as the Vedas and the Mahābhārata.

Often his theses appear to be buried under a barrage of references, but once the reader is able to navigate his course through the maze that Schwarzbaum's erudition creates, the fundamental issues become apparent. Central among them is the position of Jewish folklore in relation to European and Asian folk cultures. In a truly comparative exploration Schwarzbaum sifts through all the available versions and seeks to determine the historical and cultural course of a particular traditional theme. Although the notion of origin and historical priority is always implicit in his exploration, his essays examine the intercommunication between the religious and cultural traditions over time. He does not seek only to determine the point of origin of a particular theme or tale, but also to chart out its course in history and to point out how Jewish tradition serves as bridge between East and West.

The title of the book is a direct textual allusion to a key essay in Jewish folklore by another master annotator, Louis Ginzberg. In his article "Jewish Folklore: East and West" (1955, 61-73), Louis GINZBERG recognizes the peculiar position of Jewish folklore. In biblical times it was influenced by traditions of the Ancient Near East and Central Asian cultures, and in the post-biblical period, influenced Christian and later Moslem sources. Then in the Middle Ages the direction of influences reversed again and late Jewish traditions drew upon the Islamic narratives that had in the meantime evolved. Schwarzbaum, it appears, takes his cue from Ginzberg and is determined to explore, case by case, the particular historical dynamics of these inter-cultural influences.

Petrus Alphonsi's *Disciplina Clericalis* serves Schwarzbaum as the earliest example of the transference of Oriental themes and forms into European literature. Petrus Alphonsi (b. 1062) was an erudite scholar and a physician in the court of King Alphonso I of Aragon who converted to Christianity. His book serves "as a sort of bridge or literary medium through which Eastern, predominantly Arabic, popular stories, proverbs, and sayings have been transmitted or transplanted to Europe" (241). As Schwarzbaum points out, the pedagogical form itself draws upon Ancient Near Eastern and Indian models. The inclusion of erotic and humorous tales in the book also owes much to older Indian, Persian, and Arabic sources, providing a model and a source for many European medieval tales that were to follow. Schwarzbaum's annotation of the tales in this collection not only has proven his thesis, but has also become a classical study in itself, and it should not be overlooked (to use one of Schwarzbaum's favorite phrases) by any students who explore the introduction of Oriental themes to European literature and folklore.

The other essays in the volume represent some of the themes that have dominated Schwarzbaum's scholarship, such as his concerns with death, animal fables, and female fickleness. They reflect human concerns that are projected into scholarly endeavor and enable us to see, at least partially, Haim Schwarzbaum as the man behind his massive scholarly output. Eli Yassif should be commended for making such a thoughtful and valuable selection of articles that are a testimony for Schwarzbaum's life in scholarship.

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